

## The Pace of Change

You may think that life in the big city is fast paced, while a slower schedule rules coastal communities. But some folks will tell you the reverse may be true these days.

Several speakers at public comment sessions convened by the N.C. Waterfront Access Study Committee (WASC) noted the relative speed of the committee's work — especially compared to what they perceive as the normally slow pace of state government focused in Raleigh.

The pace of change is quick in many parts of the coast these days — and if you haven't visited recently, you may be surprised.

Folks argue that state and local agencies need to act quickly if they want to maintain or increase water access in coastal communities — where lucrative offers are regularly presented to owners of prime waterfront parcels that are not officially on the market. In some cases, these parcels include boat ramps, piers, marinas, and docks or other access points used for generations by the public and water-based commercial operations.

Turn to page 6 for a sampling of the comments received during the meetings in Manteo, Morehead City and Wilmington.

The committee was established by the N.C. General Assembly based on a recommendation from the Joint Legislative Commission on Seafood and Aquaculture, which had reviewed resolutions passed by the N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission, the N.C. Coastal Resources Commission and an ad-hoc group of maritime scholars.

The General Assembly approved the legislation on July 27, 2006, and it was signed into law Aug. 16, 2006. North Carolina Sea Grant's executive director — Michael Voiland — was appointed the committee chair, with 20 other members representing various perspectives on access issues.

Sea Grant already was involved with the waterfront issues, including cosponsorship of conferences focusing on coastal

communities, and hosting of *North Carolina's Changing Waterfront*, a June 2006 meeting that drew nearly 200 people interested in a broad spectrum of access issues.

The public response to the committee and the topics has been strong. More than 275 people attended the public comment sessions. More than 400 people receive WASC e-mail notices.

Many also check the committee's Web site — [www.ncseagrant.org/waterfronts](http://www.ncseagrant.org/waterfronts) — to read complete transcripts from the meetings.

The committee's early sessions included a presentation on the loss of fish houses, seafood dealers and processors along the coast, as well an explanation of the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission's network of public boat ramps.

The directors and students from the N.C. Coastal Resources Law, Planning and Policy Center presented research on topics such as tax incentives, as well as potential access requirements within local planning and zoning regulations.

As the panel began considering potential recommendations, members debated the phrasing for definitions of terms such as "working waterfront."

At the three public comment sessions, Jan. 30 to Feb. 1, the committee listened to more than 70 people who shared their thoughts.

At its Feb. 27 meeting, the committee discussed environmental and regulatory concerns; access at state highway/bridge rights of way; public/private efforts regarding fishing pier access; the fee structure for private use of public trust waters/submerged lands; and the potential for a new "working waterfronts" trust fund along with increases to existing funds that provide grants. The final report is due in April.

To review the N.C. Waterfront Access Study Committee's meeting agendas, presentations and transcripts, go online to: [www.ncseagrant.org/waterfronts](http://www.ncseagrant.org/waterfronts).

*Katie Mosher, Managing Editor*

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*North Carolina's diverse coast offers countless interesting subjects.*

*The large dots on the map indicate story settings in this issue — including Dare, Carteret and New Hanover counties, and the Pamlico Sound.*

